



Planning, Preparing, and Executing Your Role as the Platoon Sergeant

by First Sergeant Dennis White, U.S. Army, Retired

To be a successful noncommissioned officer and leader, it is your responsibility to mentor subordinates to an even greater success than your own. The awesome task of platoon sergeant is demanding and requires planning and preparation to successfully execute this challenging role.

In today's ever-evolving Army, the noncommissioned officer (NCO) is continuously reacting to changes and transforming soldiers to meet current mission essential requirements. Because of what seem to be endless days, NCOs are finding it more and more difficult to prepare for leadership positions.

One of the first leadership positions an NCO will completely assume is the role of platoon sergeant. Adopting some practical tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) can make the difference between successful leadership positions and unsuccessful leadership positions. Below is

a list of practical TTPs that have aided in the success of many NCOs.

Planning

During the planning process it is imperative to learn how to be a successful platoon sergeant and leader. Some of the most effective techniques are:

- Seeking out successful platoon sergeants and first sergeants and ask questions — keep notes.
- Imagining yourself as a successful platoon sergeant — daydream a little.
- Designating someone to be your mentor and let that person know you are watching.
- Starting a reading list and include *The Platoon Sergeant* and *The Mentor* by Command Sergeant Major Bobby Owens; *Warriors Words* by Peter Tsouras; *Small Unit Leadership* by Colonel

Mike Malone; *The Three Meter Zone* by Command Sergeant Major Dave Pendry; and all applicable field manuals, technical manuals, and Army regulations.

Make Tentative Goals

Setting and attaining goals are imperative to planning and preparing for any leadership position. Helpful goal-setting ideas include:

- An average physical training score of 260.
- Attaining 50 percent expert with weapons systems.
- Maintaining 95 percent readiness rate with assigned equipment (maintenance programs).
- Building strong team-oriented squads, crews, and platoons.
- Updating and validating platoon SOPs as necessary.

- Planning for educational opportunities for your soldiers (Army Knowledge Online is great!).

- Maintaining a high state of readiness.

- Having a system that prepares soldiers for local boards.

- Sending highly motivated and capable NCOs to be master fitness qualified.

- Having a good billet SOP and uniform standards.

- Remembering that all goals should be realistic and attainable.

Platoon Neat and Fun Stuff

Esprit de corps builds teams, raises morale, and fosters trust and loyalty between unit members. Some ideas for leader development may be:

- A platoon motto.

- If you have assigned vehicles, devise a marking system with pennants or small flags that helps you visualize how your platoon is arrayed or where it is located. This increases pride within your platoon.

- When a soldier leaves your platoon, ensure he receives more than just a piece of paper with the battalion commander's signature. Whatever you choose, it should be an item the soldier will cherish for years to come — use your imagination. We used sabot petals with the soldier's name, bumper number, and position painted on them. Good soldiers deserve recognition from their subordinates, peers, and leaders.

- Planning a quarterly hail and farewell with soldiers and families, possibly at your home, ensuring it is closely supervised.

- If a soldier beats your APFT score, lunch is on the platoon sergeant! This will motivate both of you.

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Prepare Your Mind, Body, and Soul

This cannot be overemphasized. Soldiers depend on leaders for intellectual, physical, and emotional support. If you cannot deal with your own issues, you will be of little use to your soldiers. Here are a few tips:

- Know and learn current doctrine and TTPs.

- Build a sensible leader's book with useful information (not fluff) and make it the platoon standard.

- Know your unit's mission essential task lists (this is a great place to find individual training tasks that are often neglected).

- *You must be very physically fit!*

- If you happen to be a person of faith, seek guidance daily!

- If possible, visit a national memorial or battlefield (this is a humbling and sobering experience and will help you fully understand the awesome responsibility you have or will assume — if you're taking this job only to "punch a ticket," seek other employment!

- Talk with your family, prepare them for long hours, phone calls in the middle of the night, and the possibility of frequent deployments.

- Develop your own philosophy or rules to live by; use Army Values as a base.

Execution

To undertake the duties and responsibilities of a platoon sergeant, you are expected to be at the top of your game. Anything less will certainly cause unnecessary turmoil within your platoon. To be an effective leader:

- Foster a "warrior spirit" within the platoon.

- Have a tactical mindset in all operations.

- Truly care about soldiers and their families (go to family readiness group meetings).

- Be a team player within the company (remember there are 3 more platoons on your flanks, stay in your lane).

- Grow accustomed to tireless activity (first one in, last to leave).

- Be a mentor; willingly share experience, knowledge, and wisdom.

- Ensure that maintenance is a priority — put that technical manual on the front slope!

- Know your soldiers — be observant, listen, and communicate.

- Be involved in all aspects of platoon operations (this does not mean micro-manage).

- Form good professional working relationships with the commander, first





sergeant, peer platoon sergeants, and other battalion leaders.

- Understand the commander's intent, vision, and what he expects from his platoon sergeants.
- Build an *excellent* relationship with your platoon leader, remembering to coach, teach, and mentor to ensure the platoon leader's success.

- Examine goals quarterly, adjust, and refocus as needed with the platoon leader's assistance.
- Delegate — this is critical.
- Counsel NCOs on a regular basis; ask to see their goals.
- Continue to grow and learn!
- Enjoy what you are doing!

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This article suggests a few ideas that have helped many platoon sergeants be successful. It is our task to prepare for combat, win decisively, and bring our troopers home.



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